Old Caves and Young Caves

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Old Caves and Young Caves: Two Qumran Collections?

Introduction[*]

According to the calculations below, the well-known theory that all or most caves were emergency hidings of the Qumran manuscript collection around 68 has to be fundamentally modified. The average age of the dated scrolls from cave 4 and from cave 1 differs to such an extent from that of the manuscripts of caves 2, 3, 5, 6 and 11, that the possibility that they are all randomly chosen samples of the same "population",[1] the same library, becomes improbable. Instead, I propose that the manuscripts from cave 1 and cave 4 represent the state of the Qumran manuscript collection at an earlier date than those from caves 2, 3, 5, 6 and 11. The latter caves represent the collection of the same group but at a later stage. Possibly, the scrolls from cave 1 were hidden before 68 CE, around the turn of the era when Qumran was destroyed by a fire after an attack. Cave 4 might have been used as an emergency hiding place, library, or as a depository already around the same time, though some manuscripts were added later.

Findings

Using table G in DJD 39,[2] the average scroll age (ASA) of each cave can be calculated as the mean age of the paleographically dated scrolls, the sum of the mean age of all its paleographically dated scrolls divided by the number of such scrolls in the cave. *Table 1*,

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[*] This electronic paper is an abbreviated version of the full article to be published in print. The research evolved during my appointment as Mandel Fellow at the Scholion Center for Interdisciplinary Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University. Parts of it were first presented at the Orion conference 2004, again in the research seminar of the *Canonization* group at the Scholion Center and a third time at the third annual symposium of the Nordic Network in Qumran Studies at the École Biblique, 2005. I am most grateful to the Nordics for their treatment of a παρεισακτος like me (hopefully not a ψευδαδελφος). Another part of the Orion presentation, a comparative study of Jewish and Christian sectarianism according to Qumran and the Jewish and Christian papyri from Oxyrhynchus will appear in a separate publication. Too many people have helped me during the course of the investigations for this paper to be mentioned. But I would like to mention Emanuel Tov, Clemens Leonhard, Amram Tropper and especially Hanan Eshel and Eibert Tigchelaar who most helpfully discussed some points of this paper with me. Many thanks also to my former research assistant Moshe Levi, who lent me a hand (and a head) with the database and to two experts in statistics who most kindly explained some of the statistical ramifications to me. Alessandra Sulzer and Jonathan Stökl considerably improved the English. I am, of course, responsible for any errors.

[1] In statistics, a population is the whole ensemble of items measured – in our case the original collection of Qumran's library (population of manuscripts), of which only some fragments survived.

[2] "Chronological Index of the Texts from the Judean Desert," DJD 39:351-446.

below, shows the ASA and the number of dated scrolls for each cave (with ten or more manuscripts), calculated according to this procedure (negative figures indicate BCE dates).

Table 1

	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	5Q	6Q	11Q	Total[3]
Number of Dated Scrolls (n)	20	26	10	542	23	24	29	690
Average Scroll Age (ASA)	-37.8	11.8	25.8	-44.5	11	5.2	9.8	-34.1
Median[4]	-43.8	19	19	-37.5	34.5	50	34.5	-25.5
σ	40.7	27.6	27.1	58.4	63.6	79.6	49	60.9

Only two scroll caves have BCE dates for their ASA: cave 1 and cave 4. The ASA of all other caves lies in the CE range (2, 3, 5, 6 and 11). Two groups of caves can be discerned, BCE caves and CE caves, or "old" and "young" caves Both groups appear to be distinct from each other since their inside range (6.7 and 20.6) is much smaller than the difference between them (ca. 43). This intuition can be statistically corroborated by a statistical test. If the origin of the scrolls of the different caves had been in the same collection, they would have to come from the same "population" which has, of course, identical statistic tendencies. The Kruskal-Wallis test calculates the probability that *k* independent random samples come from "populations" with similar central statistic tendencies, the so called "null-hypothesis." [5] I decided to run a series of three tests: one for all caves together (test A), a second one for the old caves (test B) and a third one for the young caves (test C).

Test A) Caves 1-6, 11 (n = 674; Kruskal-Wallis statistic: 99.64): $p < 0.0001$.

Test B) Caves 1 and 4 (n = 562; Kruskal-Wallis statistic: 0.06): $p = 0.8114$.

Test C) Caves 2,3,5,6,11 (n = 112; Kruskal-Wallis statistic: 7.05): $p = 0.1331$.

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[3] Including caves 7-9, KhQ scrolls and XQ scrolls.

[4] The median gives the age of that scroll where one half of other scrolls in this cave are older and the other half are younger.

[5] If this is the case and if the selection of the scrolls happened randomly, we should not be able to refute the "null-hypothesis." Usually, the null-hypothesis is considered as refuted if the test result gives a probability of less than 5% ($p < 0.05$). While many tests exist for evaluating the null-hypothesis for two or more samples, the Kruskal-Wallis test is particularly useful for comparing three or more samples of different size, distribution, mean and median. The easiest and most widespread test, a so called T-Test, is less reliable for these samples since the distribution is not normal and n<30 for a number of caves. Nevertheless, when performed it confirmed the same results reached through the Kruskal-Wallis tests.

The result of test A, $p < 0.0001$, clearly refutes the null-hypothesis for the combination of all caves. The probability that the scrolls from caves 1-6 and 11 are random samples from the same collection of manuscripts is smaller than 0.1 per mil! Test B, performed on the two old caves 1 and 4 reached a result of $p = 0.8114$; test C performed on the young caves reached a result of $p = 0.1331$. In both cases p is greater than 0.05. While the null hypothesis could be refuted with regard to the combination of all caves, this is not the case with regard to each of the groups "old caves" and "young caves." These results seem therefore to confirm the classification of the Qumran caves into two distinct groups, old and young caves.

Discussion

If the calculations above are correct,[6] we could assume either that the two groups of caves are samples from two distinct populations – one collection for the old and the other for the young caves – or that the distribution of the scrolls among the caves did not happen randomly *with regard to manuscript age*. I am convinced that the latter possibility is rather unlikely.[7] With regard to the first possibility, however, Devorah Dimant has clearly shown that cave 4 and the other caves are interlinked in their contents, ideology and selection of genre.[8] Accordingly, caves 1 and 4 come from the same sectarian collection as caves 2, 3, 5, 6 and 11. How can we explain the seeming contradiction?

I consider the following explanation the most plausible, as it clarifies the problem of the age of the scrolls without supposing completely distinct libraries: Caves 1 and 4 are samples from the same sectarian collection as caves 2, 3, 5-11, but with one difference: the two samples "old caves" were taken from the collection at an earlier time

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[6] I see the following possible errors: the paleographical dating, different paleographical datings by various authors, many of them editors of scrolls without being first-rate paleographers, the paleographical date given as a range is reduced to its mean, the exclusion of undated scrolls. With the exception of the error accumulation caused by a single author responsible for all or most scrolls in a single cave, most errors should be more or less neutralized by the bulk of the data. A reevaluation of all Qumran scrolls by one of the leading paleographers is a desideratum.

[7] The long version of the article includes with a detailed discussion of why this possibility is unlikely. Only with regard to caves 6 (papyrus section of the library) and 7 (Greek section of the library, or private collection), there is clearly a steering factor in the selection, however, not with respect to age.

[8] D. Dimant, "The Qumran Manuscripts: Contents and Significance," in: *eadem* and L. Schiffman (eds.), *Time to Prepare the Way in the Wilderness: Papers on the Qumran Scrolls by Fellows of the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989-1990* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 16; Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 23-58. To my knowledge, this attempt, qualified by her as "modest beginning" and "rudimentary," (p. 24) is still the most recent investigation of this kind.

in the life of this collection than the five samples "young caves." Unlike the latter, caves 1 and 4 were not emergency hiding places in 68 CE, but contained most (cave 4) or all (cave 1) of their manuscripts already at an earlier point in history: cave 1 as emergency hide out, cave 4 as emergency hiding place, library or depository.

Can we point to specific historical circumstances, when such a scenario might have taken place? As Jody Magness recently emphasized, the Qumran settlement seems to have been destroyed by fire at the end of period Ib dated by her to some time between 9/8 BCE and 4 BCE.[9] The fire was probably caused by an attack.[10] To my knowledge, nobody so far has raised the crucial question of how it came to be that we have manuscripts older than the first fire. If there were any scrolls in buildings above the ground, they were presumably destroyed similar to the second fire that devastated any manuscripts above the ground during the Roman attack at the end of period II in 68 CE. Scrolls in caves would have escaped this type of destruction twice. It seems rather unlikely that all of the old Qumran scrolls were imported after 4 BCE. If most of the scrolls unearthed in caves 1 and 4 were already there during the fire around 4 BCE, they would have been protected as they had been in 68 CE. They survived both devastations representing *grosso modo* the Qumran collection towards the end of period Ib.

For two reasons, what happened to cave 1 has to be slightly different with regard to cave 4. First, there clearly are CE scrolls in cave 4 but not necessarily in cave 1. Second, the entrances to caves 4a and 4b and the terrace of cave 4a are too apparent to remain hidden to anybody living in the settlement over a prolonged period. This is not so for cave 1. The cave 1 manuscripts may have been hidden around 4 BCE, before the same assault that caused the fire at the end of Magness' period Ib, and may have remained there untouched until being detected by the Bedouins. None of the cave 1 manuscripts has to be dated to the first century CE.[11] If the scrolls from cave 1 were hidden by other people than those responsible for the young caves, this would also explain why its scrolls, carefully wrapped in clothes and put into jars, were treated so differently from those in the other caves. Only cave 1 and cave 4 rolls have been found rolled up wrongly.

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[9] For the sake of simplicity, in the following I mean 9/8 BCE to 4 BCE when I speak of 4 BCE.

[10] J. Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Grand Rapids, 2002), p. 67.

[11] As far as I understand, this is true also for the archaeological remains. For the jars and the Herodian lamp, cf. G. Doudna "Redating the Dead Sea Scroll Deposits at Qumran: the Legacy of an Error in Archaeological Interpretation" (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Doudna_Scroll_Deposits_1.htm).

With regard to cave 4, we have explain four questions: what happened around 4 BCE, what happened during period II, what happened in 68 CE and most importantly, why is cave 4 an "old" cave, despite the fact that there are CE scrolls in it? I can think of the following possible scenarios addressing the four questions: Cave 4 was…

a) a library (or its "stacks") before and after 4 BCE ("LL")
b) a library before 4 BCE and then a Geniza ("LG")
c) a Geniza before and after 4 BCE ("GG")
d) an emergency hide out in 4 BCE and again in 68 CE ("EE")
e) an emergency hide out in 4 BCE and then a library (or its "stacks") ("EL")
f) an emergency hide out in 4 BCE and then a Geniza ("EG").

The most difficult question with regard to any of these scenarios seems to me, why should manuscripts have remained in cave 4 in period II after the people returned? Especially if it was an emergency hide out, we would have expected the scrolls to return to a rebuilt library. Scenario "EE" seems therefore the most unlikely. The library hypotheses ("LL" and "EL") are more probable: After the reconstruction of the library in the settlement, new manuscripts were mostly kept above the ground, yet, cave 4 served the community as "stacks". Only rarely would people deposit new scrolls in cave 4.[12] The hypothesis that the bulk of the cave 4 manuscripts remained in situ after 4 BCE and after the return of the group during period II is explained still more easily if we assume that the scrolls were useless. This would be the case if cave 4 had served as a depository for defective scrolls ("GG"), or if the scrolls had been mutilated by the attackers ("LG" or "EG"). Under these circumstances, the scrolls added during period II would have been useless as well having been put in cave 4 for this precise reason. Yet, the number of the scrolls from the "young" collection added to cave 4 was not high enough to change its character mainly reflecting the "old" collection.

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[12] Less than 18% of the dated cave 4 manuscripts *may* come from period II, and only 10% have been dated definitively to period II. If we speculate a bit more, the difference in ASA between the old and the young caves is approximately 55 years. If we discard the CE texts that were possibly deposited in cave 4 after the fire, the ASA of cave 4 becomes -61.6 and the difference in ASA between the old and young caves becomes 71.6. If we take this as the difference in years between the two fires, we get 3 or 4 BCE as a very tentative date for the first fire. Incidentally (?), the end of Herod's reign matches the date proposed also by Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 68. However, this calculation is most hypothetical.

The scrolls from the "young" caves 2, 3, 5, 6 and 11 represent a younger collection. This collection was nothing else than the library in the settlement at the point of its *second* destruction in 68 CE. Due to its *first* destruction by the fire around 4 BCE this collection contained few ancient manuscripts from before the fire and was therefore considerably younger than the old collection represented by the scrolls in cave 1 and 4. The old manuscripts in the younger collection may have been retrieved from cave 4 after the first fire, or newly imported from the outside.[13] The vast majority of the scrolls in this new library, however, were written after the first-century CE fire, in period II. More specifically, caves 2, 3, 6 and 11 may have served as emergency hiding places just before the Roman attack – the papyrus section of the library ending up in cave 6 – while caves 5 and 8-9 (and 7?) might reflect the reading material on the bedside table of the cave dwellers.

In sum, while we have to be very careful with these scenarios as explanations of the difference in age, the hypothesis of a young library in the settlement (manuscripts of which were partially hidden in the young caves, while the main library was destroyed in the Roman attack) and the assumption of an older library that survived as "stacks" or depository in cave 4, could account for the age disparities.

Regardless as to whether the scenario suggested above is going to be accepted, hopefully, the findings of this study are going to trigger new discussions of fundamental issues related to Qumran and Second Temple Judaism.

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[13] Almost all of the identified manuscripts (most probably) written before the fire are biblical. The only identified unbiblical texts from the young caves almost certainly older than the fire are 6Q9 (Apocryphon to Sam-Kgs), 6Q10 (papProph), 11Q29 (frg to Serekh Hayahad) and 11Q13 (Melchizedek).